

Questioning Order

Directions: Read the following phrases and notice the mental images they evoke. Jot down a descriptive word or phrase to describe each.

1. His and hers
2. Male and female
3. Romeo and Juliet
4. Boys and girls
5. Jack and Jill

Now, reverse the order of the words in each of the phrases. Examine your mental image of the reversed phrases and answer the following questions:

How do your perceptions and impressions change when the order of the words changes?

What assumptions are inherent in the placement of male-gendered nouns and pronouns in the first position in a list?

Treating People in Parallel Manner

Directions: Examine the sentences below and determine in what ways the participants are treated in nonparallel ways (that is, how are they treated with differing levels of formality or familiarity). Rewrite the sentences using parallel treatment.

1. The men's competition starts at 7:00, and the ladies take the ice at 9:00.
2. Heidi sanded the edges, and Mr. Turner nailed the boards together.
3. The services are open to all Christians and all pagans.
4. Everyone is welcome; and bring the grandparents with you.
5. Juan and Mr. Robinson arrived at the meeting together.

Seeing the Whole Person

Directions: Examine the following sentences in which a person or group of people is equated with a physical trait, a specific role, or medical diagnosis. Rewrite the sentences to "put the person back in."

1. We are being led by the blind.
2. She is fat.
3. The psychotics are on Ward One.

4. The wives held a barbeque.
5. Even though she was a conservative and he was a liberal, they got along pretty well.

Answer the following questions:

Why might we accept at face value statements emphasizing certain traits or diagnoses but not others?

How does the reduction of a person to one aspect of their being perpetuate power disparities, emphasis on difference, and cycles of oppression.

How are both the oppressor and the oppressed diminished when "the person is left out"?

Challenging Your Assumptions

Directions: Read the following sentences and identify the assumptions inherent in each regarding age, ability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic power/status.

Identify the norm (expected behavior) and discuss how the assumptions affect this norm.

Discuss how these assumptions operate in your cultural situation. How are you affected by cultural assumptions about the norm?

1. Our founding fathers carved this great state out of the wilderness.
2. Mrs. Imoto looks remarkably good for her age.
3. Fashion tights are available in black, suntan, and flesh color.
4. Confined to a wheelchair, Mr. Garcia still manages to live a productive life.
5. Pat really went on the warpath when the budget figures came out.

Recognizing Slanted Words

Directions: Imagine you are an observer, preparing to write a report describing an incident you witnessed or an organization you saw operating. Choose three of the paired phrases below. Write two sentences for each pair of phrases, the first from the perspective of someone who disapproves or is not in favor of the activity, the second from the perspective of someone who approves or is in favor of the activity. Write your sentences in the space below the word pairs.

cult vs. denomination
preaches vs. advocates
enthusiast vs. fanatic
made a scene vs. stood their ground

demonstrate vs. riot
muzzled vs. suppressed
assertive vs. abrasive
threaten vs. warn

Putting People Back into Language

Directions: Identify the passive constructions in the sentences below. Discuss how use of passive constructions can obscure meaning, perpetuate oppression, deflect responsibility, and deprive people of identity or of agency (autonomy) in their actions. Compare the effects of using the passive voice to those of using euphemisms (see below). What are the similarities?

Rewrite the sentences in the active voice. You may need to insert an appropriate subject or pronoun.

1. In 1920, American women were given the vote.
2. The book was removed from the library's shelves.
3. Private Gold was wounded by friendly fire.
4. The demonstrators were subdued with rubber bullets and tear gas.
5. In what year was America discovered?

Identifying Euphemisms

Directions: Identify the euphemisms in the following sentences. Discuss how euphemisms can obscure meaning, perpetuate oppression, and distance people or groups performing acts from responsibility for their actions.

Compare the effects of using euphemisms to those of using the passive voice in language. What are the similarities?

Rewrite the sentences to express the euphemistic concept more directly.

1. The Stiletz Indians were relocated to reservations by the government.
2. He lost his virginity when he was 15.
3. This administration was left with no alternative but to send in a peacekeeping force.
4. The country was embroiled in a period of ethnic cleansing.
5. That little girl was careless and got herself pregnant.